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The Transtemporality of Online Performance

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Performance's temporality is constituted through current manifestations of technological development. It can't be comprehended, nor imagined, outside digital and online discourses (Auslander 2012). Online, and increasingly mobile, technological activities such as photo and video sharing, instant messaging, blogging and social networking organize around performance practitioners' day-to-day existence. Performance projects exist, in one way or another, by and through the big four international technology companies (Facebook, Google, Apple, Amazon), and others, which continue to constitute premises through which we live our lives in the walled gardens of the online world. In this networked society, performances are constantly mediated through the prism of myriads of digital platforms. Because performances are enacted within or supported by digitally mediated networks, and this is crucial, they incessantly expand temporally, I will refer to online performance in terms of transtemporality, rather than depend on an ontology of unmediation and 'a maniacally charged present' (Phelan 1993: 148). Online performance is never fully present but immanently distended through remediation.

Departing from Peggy Phelan's arguments of performance's ontology, various scholars expose the impossibility of pure presence of live performance outside of mediation. Amelia Jones (2011 and 2012) and Mechtild Widrich (2012) reveal that claims of a supposed presence of unmediated performance, perhaps paradoxically, depend on, and sometimes even are created by, an augmented network of mediations of that performance. These scholars,

together with Rebecca Schneider (2011), have shown, for instance via a thorough reading of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of J. L. Austin's performative, how notions of performance, reiteration and documentation are intertwined and contingent. They reveal the deconstructive project's potential in the contemporary field of performance studies. Schneider points out both the impossibility and possibility of returning to an original performance event. In her reading of Richard Schechner's theories on performance and re-enactment, she agrees with his description of performance as 'twice-behaved behavior' (Schechner 1985: 36). Yet, she critiques the categorical relationship Schechner implies between notions of past and present. Even though Schechner recognizes reiteration as a characteristic of performance, he states that 'it is not possible to "get back to" what was' (Schechner cited in Schneider 2011: 127). Influenced both by Derrida's work and Judith Butler's idea of 'sedimented acts' (Butler 1990: 274), Schneider criticizes Schechner's statement of the impossibility of a re-enactment's returning to what was. She argues, in contrast to Schechner, that one can get back to what was, using a figure of 'cross-temporality' (Schneider 2011: 37).

Following Schneider, it is contradictory to regard a return as impossible: 'If the past was already self-different by virtue of being composed in restoration, then ... the fact that restoration renders an event different really only renders it the same as it originally was: different' (127). Her hypothesis is that, by means of live reiteration, performance is a cross-temporal exchange where neither the present nor the original event is ever

only itself. Performance partakes in cross-temporal conversations passing around and among bodies 'in again-time ... in a partial or incomplete or fragmented manner' (9). With Schneider the temporal frame of performance becomes porous, rather than being predicated on an instantaneous now. This notion of performance's unsettled and incomplete temporality is crucial in understanding what I define as transtemporality of online performance; performances enacted within online discourses diffract temporally through various human bodies and non-human networks.

In addition, and this is altogether interlinked with the previous discussion, numerous performance scholars argue that the means through which performance is mediated, such as video recordings of performance events or written scores, hold performative potential. André Lepecki argues, when analysing Allan Kaprow's performance scores in *18 Happenings in Six Parts*, that documents are not merely 'dead remainders ... [but] they ... prescribe, pre-arrange, create and launch' (Lepecki 2012). Paul Clarke and Julian Warren interestingly allow for the somewhat idealistic methodologies surrounding the launch of Web 2.0 around 2004 to reverberate into the debates on the performativity of performance documents and archives. While discussing the future of the British performing arts archive at the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol, they propose that a Web 2.0-based archive might initiate a quality of ongoing 'eventhood': 'The question that keeps returning is ... how to open up the archiving process ... rich with the potential for remixing and recycling and the undoing of the singular archival authority' (Clarke and Warren 2009: 61). By including various online social media interactions and processes of re-enactment into the project of performance archiving, they suggest documents-as-events that are open to variability.

Recent performative answers to the logic of the archive are found in Amelia Jones' and Adrian Heathfield's anthology *Perform Repeat Record: Live Art in History*, consisting of various propositions to 'produce archival

forms whose containment is questioned by their evident divergence and fragmentation, by their presentation of paradox, forms that present their inevitable contingency, opening themselves to what they are not' (Heathfield 2012: 33). In the current web-based era, re-enactments, like other performances, unfold by, and continuously reappear through, various means of digitized mediation. Performance takes part in the eventhood of the decentralized digital archive and it is, as argued by Mechtild Widrich, 'performatively defined through its descriptions, disseminations, and other permutations' (2012: 97). It constantly reiterates itself through online representations of photos, blog posts, videos, reviews, tweets and retweets. What the illustrated works below suggest are the ways in which online representations of (re) performance become performative. These works continuously remediate and expand through an ever-fluctuating network.

In October 2013, Adam Weinert presented the work *The Reaccession of Ted Shawn* at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York (Weinert 2013). In one of the galleries, Weinert creatively embodied the contents of Ted Shawn's papers and other documentary materials originally housed in the digital archive of the dance retreat Shawn founded, Jacob's Pillow (see Jacob's Pillow Archives). Weinert is an alumnus of The School at Jacob's Pillow and Shawn's digitized documents served as points of departure to generate new potentialities through his current work. Importantly, Weinert's work included the installation phase *Without Consent* in 2014. In this phase, Weinert invited the public to co-create content by filming and uploading their own reperformances of his re-enactments of Shawn's work to Weinert's website. The visitors of the installation were able to view Weinert's re-enactments from 2013 using a mobile app equipped with augmented reality technology. Weinert offered his reperformance as a performative intervention and unfolded the embodied archiving process of Shawn's work further to future re-enactors, via a range of online digital media. He exposed the performance archive to be a system of

transformation in the hands of re-enactors and online technologies.

Dancer André Zachery was one visitor who embraced Weinert's invitation to reperform his work in the gallery space, document his own reperformance and upload it online. Zachery engaged his body, making its represented movements accessible through a digitized web of augmented reality technology, an application on his smartphone, the sharing site YouTube and Weinert's website to create three filmed solos (Zachery 2014). Thus, the performance(s) continued transtemporally throughout digitally mediated networks. Weinert's *Without Consent* was, and still is, constituted by and dilated through numerous digital media, such as various online articles, YouTube videos of visitors' reperformances, hundreds of Facebook and Vimeo comments and 'likes', tweets and retweets, production stills made to promote the project over the web and the exhibition programme (digital and printed). Weinert's digitally mediatized performance becomes an interface that leaves traces and dynamic trajectories. It suggests temporality as constituted by, and augmented through, a variety of media, not unlike Jones' proposition that, in certain kinds of performance, 'temporality is understood more as a network of ideas that expands outward but always from multiple rather than singular origins ... a Bergsonian layering rather than a point-to-point teleology' (Jones 2011:30). Weinert's performance is a porous transtemporal assemblage constantly accelerating towards and away from itself and its mediatized networks of dissemination.

In 2012 I presented the online performance work *This is Not a Performance* (Engdahl 2012). The work consisted of digitally reperforming Louise Ahl's work from 2010 (Ahl 2010). I viewed a video document of Ahl's live performance through the social network website Swedance. Swedance was an online community forum consisting of about 500 practising members from twenty-eight countries. The members would together form a living performance archive by uploading to

the website various forms of digital documents of their performance practices in the forms of videos, photos, reviews and rehearsal notes, among other things. They would use each other's online documents as inspiration for their own practices and as source material for performance re-enactments. Ahl's video of her *This is Not a Dance* was one document that would serve as a spark for new creation. She had produced her work by performing instructions for performance noted down by a number of people in the comment sections of her blog. The blog comments from various sources were transformed into Ahl's performance; in turn, the dance was digitally documented in video and posted back online to the Swedance community. There it was picked up by myself and reperformed as *This is Not a Performance*, again recorded and reposted next to Ahl's 'original' documents on the website. The new recording *This is Not a Performance* generated various sharings via Facebook and numerous tweets as it awaited to be reperformed again in the hands of the other Swedance members. A current time of *This is Not a Performance* was nowhere to be found as it consisted of a multiplicity of temporal subcurrents and countercurrents. The piece folded and unfolded through a Mobius strip of digitally mediated enactments and repetitions.

This is Not a Performance might even suggest that performance continuously escapes a sense of Being. Performance's ontology, or rather its ontogenesis proposed by Heathfield (2012:32), resides with the elements of transformation inherent in its networked repetitions. The relational and non-essentialist framework of Actor Network Theory is helpful to address this ontogenesis of online performance. Using the terms of ANT we can propose that performance is an effect of a network of heterogeneous and interacting materials, whether they are human or non-human, or consist of embodied or disembodied skills (Latour 2005). Online performance results from passing around and across various human bodies and non-human networks. Disparate mediated enactments penetrate each other and

form a disjointed and expanded body of work. The authority of performance in our 'computer-literate society' (Jones 2011: 34) gains its momentum from its ability to constantly reconnect and transform itself anew.

Following on from Jones' and Widrich's descriptions of indefinite remediations of performance (Jones 2011 and Widrich 2012), all performative moments of *Without Consent* and *This is Not a Performance*, whether they are retweets or reperformances only available via video sharing websites, simultaneously recreate (reiterate) and procreate (cause) other acts in a potentially inexhaustible digitized network. Christopher Bedford interestingly argues that any performance art event temporally exceeds itself through critical, theoretical as well as artistic acts, suggesting a 'viral ontology' of performance art: 'a given performance ... splinters, mutates and multiplies over time in the hands of various critical constituencies in a variety of media' (2012: 78).

The two projects discussed in this article position the live performance event as viral, yet it is not, as Bedford argues in relation to Chris Burden's renowned *Shoot* from 1971, a 'beginning point, the source ... [or] the foundation of a viral chain' (85). It is always already among and dispersed through technological and viral chains. Their 'almost live' (Read 2014) performances are marked by and diffused through the dispersed representationality of online networks. *Without Consent* and *This is Not a Performance* participate in inherently ruptured transtemporal networks through which performances are continuously remediated and transformed.

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